Impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) Strategy on the Sustainable Adaptation of Organic Food Products in West Bengal: A Study

SUMMARY OF WORK
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Introduction and Background

There has been a shift in consumer beliefs regarding health, environmental sustainability, and ethical responsibility, as evidenced by the present growth in demand for organic food around the world. Despite this, this pattern is rapidly gaining traction in certain regions, such as West Bengal. Despite the fact that organic food is known to have a number of benefits, including the absence of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, and genetically modified organisms, the adoption of organic products in Indian households is hindered by a number of factors, including the high cost of organic food, a lack of awareness, and difficulties in obtaining organic food. Customers' communication and decision-making processes have been revolutionized as a result of the proliferation of digital technology, particularly through the use of electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) refers to the spread of information and opinions about products using digital platforms, most commonly through reviews, social media, and endorsements from influential individuals. In contrast to traditional word of mouth, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) facilitates the dissemination of information to a more extensive audience, speeds up the propagation process, and provides documentation that is accessible to the public, which assists in the evaluation of specific products. The importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) cannot be overstated when it comes to the organic food industry, which requires a higher level of consumer confidence. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is becoming an increasingly important intermediary in the process of influencing consumer perceptions and encouraging behavioral change. This is because individuals are becoming more and more dependent on digital material prior to making significant purchasing decisions.

Increasing urbanization and digital literacy present an excellent setting for assessing how digital discourse impacts the acceptability of organic food, which is the focus of this study, which investigates the effect that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays in consumer behavior in West Bengal. The research investigates a crucial question: Is it possible for electronic word-of-mouth to bridge the trust and awareness gap in order to encourage sustainable purchasing patterns in a region that is still developing?

Research Context and Significance

Despite its growth, the organic food market in India is still considered a niche business in compared to the rules of the worldwide market. There are locations, such as West Bengal, where urbanization corresponds with rising health concerns and environmental consciousness. In these regions, the influence of internet platforms on customer views is becoming increasingly crucial. In particular, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which is a sort of digital marketing, is contributing to the transformation of the ways in which individuals obtain information and make decisions regarding their purchases. When compared to traditional forms of advertising, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is considered to be more credible, genuine, and driven by the consumers themselves.

The significance of the study lies in the fact that it takes a multidimensional approach, analyzing the impact of trust, message quality, source trustworthiness, and emotional appeal in electronic word-of-mouth on the adoption of organic products by consumers. Digital marketing, sustainable consumption, and consumer behavior in emerging nations are the three academic domains that are relevant to this topic. Additionally, the research provides governments and businesses with constructive insights that may be utilized in their efforts to promote sustainable food systems through the utilization of new communication approaches.

This investigation is focused on a specific region of India, but it may be expanded to cover a wider area. It offers a framework for understanding the dynamics of digital effect in different parts of India or in other developing countries. In light of the global sustainability goals and India's increased legislative focus on organic agriculture, it is both opportune and essential to gain an understanding of how electronic word-of-mouth could potentially speed up consumption in order to develop a comprehensive sustainable agri-food ecosystem.

Research Objectives and Questions

In order to shed light on the role that electronic word-of-mouth plays in the organic food business in West Bengal, the thesis is structured around research questions and objectives that have been expressed in a clear and concise manner.

Objects of the Research are as follows:

1. To determine the extent to which customers' intentions to buy organic food are influenced by word-of-mouth in the form of electronic communication.

2. To identify the components of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that contribute to favorable or bad perceptions of organic products so that appropriate action can be taken.
3. To determine the extent to which environmental and health consciousness influences the options that consumers choose to pursue.
4. To conduct research into the potential for growth that the organic food industry in West Bengal represents in the future.
Research Questions: - In what manner does electronic word-of-mouth influence the sustained uptake of organic food in urban compared to rural environments?
Which specific aspects of electronic word-of-mouth content (such as credibility and emotional tone, for example) have an impact on the decisions that consumers make?
- Does the link between electronic word-of-mouth and consumer behavior become significantly less significant when environmental and health factors are taken into account?
With the purpose of addressing a critical research gap, this study investigates the ways in which digital communication, namely electronic word of mouth (eWOM), promotes sustainable consumer decisions in the culturally varied and economically distinct region of West Bengal. It is hoped that the findings will provide insights into future strategies for digital marketing as well as public regulations.

Theoretical Framework

The investigation is founded on a solid theoretical framework that incorporates four well-known models that shed light on consumer behavior in relation to information processing and digital influence.
1. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a model that describes the process by which consumers embrace and employ technology, with an emphasis on perceived utility and user-friendliness. In order to gain an understanding of the manner in which consumers accept electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as a trustworthy source of information, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is brought into play.
This model, known as the Information Adoption Model (IAM), focuses on the processes that humans go through in order to ingest and react to information that is found online. Within the context of customer decision-making, this model assesses the impact of factors such as the quality of communication, the strength of arguments, and the credibility of sources.

This theory, known as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), proposes that attitudes and subjective standards are the primary factors that influence behavioral intentions. The purpose of this is to investigate the role that peer influence through electronic word-of-mouth has on the choices that consumers make about organic food.

The customer Purchasing Behaviour Model (CPBM) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the internal and external elements that influence customer decisions. This paradigm takes into account psychological, cultural, and social components of consumer behavior.

These models, when taken as a whole, offer a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which consumers engage with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and the ways in which it influences their beliefs and behaviors about organic agricultural products. In addition, they provide assistance in the formulation of hypotheses and direct the framework for the analysis of data in the study.

Methodology

In order to comprehensively cover both the quantitative and qualitative components of customer behavior, the research utilized a mixed-methods approach.

The state of West Bengal was the location of a comprehensive survey that was carried out among a diverse sample of urban and semi-urban consumers.

Methods such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were utilized in the undertaking of data analysis, which was carried out with the assistance of software applications such as Python and NVIVO.

- Regression Analysis - Evaluation of the reliability and validity of the data (using indicators such as Cronbach's alpha and KMO)

The qualitative method consisted of conducting in-depth interviews with consumers in order to get detailed narrative data regarding their experiences with organic food and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

The use of thematic analysis allowed for the identification of recurring patterns and insights that contributed to the improvement of quantitative findings.

It was ensured that there would be representation across a wide range of age demographics, financial levels, and geographical places by the use of purposeful sampling.

There was a strict adherence to ethical procedures, which included maintaining confidentiality and obtaining informed consent from participants.

The combination of statistical rigor and contextual insights that is involved in this methodology ensures that a thorough understanding of the research problem is achieved. It makes it possible for the findings to be both generalizable within the demographic that was investigated and thoroughly representational of the narratives associated with particular customers.

Key Findings and Analysis

The study highlights the impact of electronic word-of-mouth on customer behavior in the organic food business in West Bengal by revealing considerable data that highlights the significance of this phenomenon.

The impact of electronic word-of-mouth on the intention to make a purchase involves:

Consumers are greatly influenced by online evaluations, particularly those that are considered to be authentic and reputable.

It has been noted that younger people are highly influenced by electronic word-of-mouth from health professionals and influencers on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube.

Trust is increased and the perceived risk associated with the higher cost of organic food is reduced when positive word-of-mouth communications are transmitted via electronic means.

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) that is positive is influenced by the following factors: - Emotional narratives, such as testimonials about improved health as a result of switching to organic food, have demonstrated a substantial amount of persuasive efficacy.

It was determined that more trustworthy ratings were those that included comprehensive assessments of product quality, ethical sourcing, and brand transparency.

The persuasive power of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) was increased by the inclusion of visual content and movies that were made by website visitors.

The following are examples of factors that contribute to negative word-of-mouth: - Unhappiness with product quality, inadequate customer service, and pricing problems seem to be the most common catalysts for negative word-of-mouth.

A more significant influence was produced by negative reviews when the reviewer possessed a substantial following or displayed competence in the subject matter.

Environmental Consciousness and Health Concerns: It has been found that there is a substantial correlation between health consciousness and the intention to purchase organic fruit and vegetables.

Customers' preference for organic products can be attributed to environmental concerns, particularly those pertaining to the application of pesticides and the sustainability of the product.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and regression analysis validated that message credibility and perceived utility are statistically significant predictors of purchase intention. These concerns amplified the effect of favorable electronic word-of-mouth and diminished the impact of negative remarks. As a result, the impact of negative remarks was diminished.

Through the use of CFA, the dependability of qualities such as health awareness, confidence in brands, and environmental consciousness was validated.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) serves not only as a marketing tool but also as a motivation for sustainable behavior, particularly among customer categories who are concerned about being healthy and ecologically sensitive.

Evaluation of eWOM Content Components

According to the findings of the study, electronic word-of-mouth can be broken down into three key content parts that have a significant impact on the behavior of customers:

1. The credibility of the source in comparison to anonymous or unverified sources, evaluations from experts or influential people who have a good reputation were more influential.
2. The valence and tone of the message: Positive communications highlighted advantages such as enhanced flavor and health benefits, whereas negative ads focused on product complaints regarding pricing and quality.

It was found that posts that included personal tales and significant emotional triggers were more engaging and persuasive than those that did not include such elements.

It is the combination of these components that enhances the influence that the message has on the perception of the consumer. According to the findings of the research, in order to promote customer behavior, businesses should curate and enhance high-quality electronic word-of-mouth using the aforementioned components.

It is clear that the organic food market in West Bengal has a large amount of room for expansion, particularly in urban areas like Kolkata and tier-2 cities. Notable advancements include a growing understanding regarding the safety of food and the importance of maintaining fitness.

The availability of organic products is increased through the use of internet markets and organic stores located in the local area.

There has been a rise in the number of organized retailers that sell organic brands.

According to a market survey, the transformation is being driven by younger consumers who are actively engaged in digital activities. This tendency has been strengthened by measures taken by the government, such as the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), as well as by consumer marketing.

The growth rate of organic food sales in metropolitan areas is surpassing that of conventional food sales, and the rise of local organic enterprises shows that there is potential for future scaling.

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Future Directions

The majority of the research is focused on residents in urban and semi-urban areas in the state of West Bengal. There is a possibility that future research will expand to rural areas or do comparison analysis across a number of Indian states. One potentially fruitful area of investigation is the role that artificial intelligence can play in controlling the spread of information through electronic word of mouth and preventing the spread of false information.

Those in charge of marketing should work together with micro-influencers to produce real electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that is specific to the local area.

Utilize customer loyalty programs to encourage feedback from customers.

Take a proactive approach to dealing with unfavorable feedback in order to cultivate trust.

Those in charge of formulating public policy should work to raise awareness among consumers about organic certification and authenticity.

It is recommended that incentives be allocated for organic agriculture in order to reduce production costs.

Promote the use of electronic word-of-mouth in sustainable agriculture by facilitating digital efforts that advocate for its distribution.

For the purpose of accelerating the adoption of organic food in a sustainable manner, it is essential to put together a comprehensive strategy that includes marketing, policy, and community participation.

According to the findings of the study, electronic word-of-mouth has a substantial impact on the purchasing decisions of consumers in West Bengal who are interested in organic food. Word-of-mouth marketing through electronic means has the potential to accelerate the adoption of organic products in a sustainable manner by fostering trust, raising awareness, and aligning with consumer values. The powerful relationship that it provides between digital interaction and conscientious consumption is a significant benefit.